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Longtime Hilltopper Remembers Past Presidents

Meet 91-year-old Col. Edgar B. Stansbury.

Here is a man who, in his 72 years as a Hilltopper, has known every Western president, has attended every Homecoming but two since 1961, and put the famous red towel in E.A. Diddle's hand.

Stansbury, a Shepherdsville native, started at Western in 1926.

He came to the Hill almost penniless and unmotivated.

What did he study?

"As little as I could get by with," he said.

Then Stansbury met Diddle, the man who changed his life dramatically.

After watching Stansbury play basketball with some friends, Diddle found him a job and convinced him to play for Western.

"From that day until he died, he was a great friend of mine," Stansbury said.

It wasn't until years later that he realized how good a friend Diddle was.

In 1927 Stansbury took a full-time job and decided he wasn't coming back to school. Diddle came looking for him.

Stansbury said Diddle looked him in the eye, and then Stansbury knew he'd have to come back to school.

"When you got up close to Mr. Diddle and you saw those blue eyes staring you down, you knew he meant business," he said.

So Stansbury played football, basketball and baseball for Diddle and returned in 1934 as an assistant basketball coach.

As a student, Stansbury came to respect Western's founder, Henry Hardin Cherry.

In those days the college's nearly 900 students would file into chapel, as required, where Cherry would speak.

"You couldn't listen to him speak without getting a vision," Stansbury said. And Cherry rubbed off in other ways.

When Stansbury returned to coach, it was Cherry who gave him and his wife somewhere to live. They paid rent by taking care of the place.



Another former president Kelly Thompson, also inspired Stansbury.

Thompson and Stansbury attended Western together.

"Most of the buildings on this campus are here because of him," Stansbury said. "That man could sell ice to Eskimos."

While coaching under Diddle, Stansbury was sent to recruit a local high school basketball player.

He was impressed with the player, and persuaded him to play for Western.

That boy's name was Dero Downing and the two have been friends ever since.

Downing said he is proud of his friend's connection to Western's history.

"Kelly Thompson was like a brother to him, Mr. Diddle was like a father, and Henry Hardin Cherry, well, he inspired everyone he met," Downing said.

It wasn't until his time as an assistant coach that Stansbury made his own significant contribution to Western's history.

At the time, athletes were stealing towels from the locker rooms and Diddle asked Stansbury to fix the problem.

"We decided we had to do something about those damn towels," he said.

So Stansbury had the towels dyed purple so they could be identified, a move that didn't work out like he expected.

The dye didn't hold and was turning the players' faces purple.

They tried again, this time asking the laundry service what color would not leave the players looking battered and bruised.

Red was that color, and it stuck.

Stansbury's relationship with the university was forever sealed recently when the concourse of Diddle Arena was given his name, after he promised more than \$1 million in assets to Western.

The money was a gift that Stansbury said he hopes will keep other students from struggling financially as he did.

"My first year at Western I didn't have any money," he said. "I began thinking, 'Wouldn't it be great if someone would give something to help the students out?'"

"And time went by and I began to think I might be able to do this."

Stansbury now lives in Largo, Fla., but visits Bowling Green every fall because he said coming back to Western means he'll make new friends.

And while most of the people who were here while he was are gone, either having moved on or died, Stansbury keeps coming back.

"It still feels like home."

Timeline

1906 – born in Corbin, KY, grew up in Shepherdsville

1922-1926 – attended Shepherdsville High School

1926-1929 – WKU student – 3 year letterman in basketball, football and track; all state guard in basketball and all state end in football

1929 – assistant coach at Greenville High School

1930 – head coach at Lancaster High School

1931 – married Edith Rupard

1933– master's degree from Peabody

1935-1942 – assistant basketball coach under Diddle; assistant football coach under Terry; professor of Physical Education

1942-1946 – military leave, served in US Army Air Corps

1943 – commissioned lieutenant in US Army Air Corps

1946 – Director of Athletics

1947 – went back into the Air Force

1961 – retired from the Air Force; joins Honeywell in St. Petersburg, FL

1971 – retired from Honeywell; joins Bay Island Venture as vice president

1994 – inducted into WKU Athletics Hall of Fame

1998 – creates WKU scholarships; Diddle Arena concourse named for Stansbury

2009 – dies Largo, Florida, aged 103

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UA1C11/21 Edgar Stansbury Photography Collection

UA94/6/2/2 Edgar Stansbury Student/Alumni Papers

"WKU Supporter Col. Ed Stansbury Pledges \$1 Million+ for Scholarships, *On Campus*, May/June 1998, p. 2.